

## **BARBARA BIGLIA (Questionnaire)**

### **1) How would you define your social class? (Explain your terminology)**

BARBARA BIGLIA: What is social class? I think the meaning of this category varies both culturally and geographically between north and south Europe. In my experience here in Spain (and this also applies to Italy), the class divide is not as vast as Britain. This does not mean that people are not discriminated against for lots of reasons (including economic ones), but not necessarily in the same way as Britain. To be sure there exists very rich and very poor people but the majority of people are part of the 'middle class'. We are not rigidly defined by class from childhood. Our accent, schooling or university education does not define us for life. I believe that in the south, with the demise of farmers, the introduction of flexibility into the labor market, the increase in competition and the isolation felt by so many in urban centres, class consciousness is almost disappearing. Perhaps new immigrants could potentially constitute a class group but unfortunately, most of the time, they are divided along ethnic lines. Within this panorama, I think of myself as fortunate because I have a lot of resources at my disposal and many close friends but I am also aware that my grant is precarious and I lack an independent source of income. I recognize I am fortunate because I probably enjoy certain objective middle class privileges but, in any case, I still feel (mostly) working class.

### **2) Exactly how would you describe your politics? (Or alternatively, describe your political development to date?)**

BARBARA BIGLIA: I have been involved in social movements and the autonomous feminist movement since 1986. My participation is not always committed due to personal problems, scepticism, boredom and so on. I have decided never to get involved with formal political parties or groups.

*(followed on next page)*

### **3) What is your assessment of the current status of capitalism and the class struggle?**

BARBARA BIGLIA: I am not a political theorist and I feel uncomfortable dishing out a general ‘prescription’ on this issue. So the best I can do is to give an impressionistic account. Firstly, I believe that ethnographic differences are really important. Even if oppression is globalized, it does not hurt people in the same manner. We live within different zones of capitalism, which subjects us to a differentiated system of domination. In some areas there still exists a certain class-consciousness that seems to have died out elsewhere. The presence or absence of social networks underline cultural differences. Today the class struggle represents an interesting and potentially subversive factor in certain areas of the planet. However, in other areas we need to take onboard non-class issues in order to fight oppression imaginatively. Finally, I am pessimistic about the anti-globalization movement, which in my view is rapidly becoming a reformist project with a radical mask.

*Annual Review of Critical Psychology*  
Anti-Copyright © 2003 Discourse Unit  
Vol. 3, pp. 65-83 (ISSN: 1464-0538)

## **Radicalising academia or emptying the critics?**

**Barbara Biglia**

**Departament de Psicologia Basica, Facultat de Psicologia,  
Universitat de Barcelona**

[bbiglia@psi.ub.es](mailto:bbiglia@psi.ub.es)

### **...Beginnings**

When I received the invitation to write a paper for this issue of ARCP, I was pleased because the topic seemed very interesting. In fact, I had noticed that during recent years, we have been experiencing in the ‘first

world' a new surge of radical theory. As a result within academia, especially in Northern Europe and USA, there is apparently more space for critical debate. When I began to get in touch with the 'first side of the first world academe', this process seemed to me, as a South-European PhD student, very impressive. However, as an activist, I very soon came across many people theorising Social Movements (SM) who were only familiar with the work being done within academia. Thus the initial optimism soon disappeared.

Some questions then presented themselves: What is the meaning of our radicalism? Who is our critique for? Are we really in a radical age or is it becoming fashionable to be radical? This article provides me with the opportunity to reflect on these themes. Still I have to admit to a certain trepidation since I don't see myself as a political theorist and writing in a foreign language will limit my ability to express myself clearly<sup>1</sup>. But I'll try to write to the best of my ability, eroding academic jargons and talking not from the perspective of an abstract Knowledge but from my experiences (including all the voices who debate issues of relevance with me from time by time).

I hope my reflections<sup>2</sup> will be of interest to some of this journal's readers. This paper aims to look at us. To me, being critical must start from self-criticism. 'Self-criticism and personal change are not apolitical- refusing to be what the system requires you to be is a profound and powerful form of direct actions' (Subbuswamy & Patel, 2001, 541-543).

### **...Situating myself**

In truth, responding to the initial questionnaire was very hard for me, since I hate giving rapid judgements and I am acutely aware that a short response cannot escape generalisation. I did fill in the questionnaire at the end because as I understand the idea was for us to permit the reader to know where we are coming from (politically), in order to comprehend and critique our work more easily.

But I feel I need to spend some more time elaborating my answers since some of the terms used in the questionnaire seem ambiguous to me.

---

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the editors for correcting my English.

<sup>2</sup> I will be concentrating on the situation in Western Europe and my reflections should not be generalized to other societies.

The first big set of doubts arose when I read the expression ‘class struggle’. My political engagement started years ago with the end of the strong working struggle movement in Italy. We found ourselves, in the second part of the 1980s, without the class (consciousness) that, in theory at least, is meant to be related somehow to struggle; the factories around us were closing and consciousness was almost non-existent. Most of the old activists had disappeared; some were in prison, others in exile, most dropped out of public life; almost all the ones still visible became completely institutionalised. So, as young activists, we moved from the class referent to a more complex set of references including the oppressed and marginalised- subjects more similar to us. For this reason I find it odd to talk about the ‘class struggle’ in the here and now even if it may be possible elsewhere. If Social Movements do not entirely consist of middle and upper class ‘activists’ then neither are they a genuine expression of the working classes in the ‘Marxist’ sense of the term<sup>3</sup>.

The second set of doubts arose when I tried to think about Critical Psychology. What exactly is it? Does a critical psychology exist? Is it not better to talk about Critical Psychologies? Am I a critical psychologist?

I can’t really give an answer to these questions because it seems to me that many people, influenced by different ideologies and practices, describe themselves as critical psychologists. Before writing this article I looked through the library database and came to the conclusion that the only thing these critical psychologists had in common was that they are not yet part of mainstream psychology. Burman<sup>4</sup> writes, ‘Critical psychology is what people do in challenging the oppressive and disingenuous actions done by psychologists or in the name of psychology’. But in reality, being ‘critical’ is becoming fashionable and not all the people calling themselves critical have the ethical or political principles expressed by Erica.

At the same time, I have the impression that sometimes tools and instruments used by critical psychologists acquire an unwarranted radical status. As Gordo-Lopez suggests,

---

<sup>3</sup> A section of the Italian political literature (related to the Autonomist tradition) defines the new categories of *immaterial* worker as intellectual workers because, even if they are working in the tertiary sector of the economy, they are subjected to flexibility measures and therefore they no longer have job guarantees. Moreover, their position in the labour market makes them exploited subjects. Although, this group, due to its particular characteristics (for instance its middle-upper class supervisory status, lack of class consciousness and solidarity, its perennial competitiveness and individualism, etc) cannot be considered the same as the factory working class of the 1960s and 70s.

<sup>4</sup> Interviewed by Ian Law and Bill Lox (1998).

*Viewpoints that arise from potential subversive situations [...] are incorporated, neutralised and redefined within the discipline as methodological innovations or merely as qualitative investigative techniques (Gordo-Lopez, 2001).*

In other words deconstruction and qualitative methods can be used to justify reactionary practice. Deconstruction and relativism, for example, have been used by some to posit the notion that the Holocaust was an invention and to propagate their historical revisionist point of view. Has a similar process aided the *reabsorption*<sup>5</sup> of critical psychology?

I feel myself closest to the standpoint of ‘anti-psychiatry’ in the sense expressed by Bucalo (1997, 54),

*anti-psychiatry is not a theory but a practice...it is an everyday practice with which we confront other people's experience and at the same time define our own...regarding interpersonal relations, anti-psychiatry does not limit itself to the negation of internment or the coercion of people's subjectivities; it is furthermore an acknowledgment of those experiences/abilities within human beings.*

In other words being anti-psychiatry should be read as a way of being in relation to the world and the subjectivities within it. This is primarily a *personal* anti-psychiatry.

Finally, the third set of doubts that the questionnaire evokes in me: What is the anti-capitalist movement? Is it really possible to talk about one anti-capitalist movement? For example, are the *Mapuche* movement, *Tute Bianche* or *Attac* part of the same struggle? Is there a lot of commonality between the anarchist perspective and NGOs' politics? Do we fight for the same goals? Is there a common struggle?

The definition of Social Movements (SM) is extremely varied and includes many groups with different styles and political positions and the attempt to find a common theory to explain them will result in homogenisation and simplification<sup>6</sup>. Even when we try to limit analysis to self-professed anti-capitalist movements we are still left with an enormous range of different groups and political options. What is the common ground? Do they work as friends or antagonists? Bearing in mind such heterogeneity, if we want to

---

<sup>5</sup> Later on in the article I will explain what I mean by *reabsorption*.

<sup>6</sup> The two widely utilised theories in this regard are the American *Resource Mobilisation Theory* (RTM), which emphasizes the cost-benefit model of SM participation, and the European *New Social Movement* (NSM) theory, which concentrates more on group identities.

achieve a cross fertilisation between ‘critical psychology’ and ‘anti-capitalist movements’, we should start by streamlining the definition of ‘anti-capitalist movements’. To complicate matters a further set of questions occur to me: Is there a relationship between academia’s general interest in social movements and the media’s sudden fascination with the ‘anti-globalisation movement’? Are self-defined anti-capitalists really subversive? And, finally, is academe the proper arena for discussing such issues? On this note, let’s start with some concrete reflections on the problematic.

### **Being within or being for...**

#### **What are we talking about? Why are we talking?**

When I decided to write a thesis on gender relationships of militants in the radical social movement<sup>7</sup>, I wanted to work from within (Plows, 1998; Wall, 1999). The aim for me, as an insider was to understand and improve our gender relations and to reduce sexism in all its manifestations<sup>8</sup>.

I was completely unaware of theories on social movements and I immersed myself in the literature. I found both really interesting texts and awful ones, but there was something that was escaping to me, and I wasn't able to put my finger on it. Then I participated in my first Social Movement congress and then, and only then, did I see the light.☺

In my opinion, the problem was that the majority of participants were SM outsiders and were, in any case, trying to explain SM dynamics to academia, to society in general or to a political party, instead of trying to create a debate within SM.

In a recent contribution, Barker and Cox (2001-02, page 2), analyse the relation between research on SM and being activists. They use the Gramscian distinction between ‘traditional’ (in this case, academic) and ‘organic’ (activist) intellectuals and pose three fundamental questions in order to decide which side the researcher represents. These are:

#### 1. What kind of knowledge do they produce?

---

<sup>7</sup> I basically work with groups that are affiliated to anarchist or autonomist perspectives. They could probably be grouped under the label Direct Action Movement.

<sup>8</sup> In a way I just want to systematize and improve the work begun by autonomous feminists years ago. As an example of such research see the article archived at, <http://www.tncrew.org/sessismo/index.html>.

2. What's their 'relevant community'?, and
3. Who plays the part?

They believe that 'traditional intellectuals' tend to produce a system of knowledge, which is more static and explanatory so that it can be validated by academia. In contrast, 'organic intellectuals' develop a more situated and dynamic analysis related to the possibility of action, which then has to be debated and accepted by militants. I find this distinction interesting despite the authors' romantic vision of activists<sup>9</sup>, and also despite their more expansive definition of activism (they include trade union stewards and leftist party apparatchiks as activists). Nevertheless, I believe this situation is not specific to Social Movement studies. It emerged from an ethical position within academia (Biglia, 2000).

The problem occurs if we set out to explain and justify the SM point of view instead of using its theoretical tools to subvert mainstream knowledge. We, as activist-academics, have to ensure this by introducing the Radical Social Movement's (RSM) ideas into academia. Some of us have already attempted to do that with feminism<sup>10</sup>, researching and producing knowledge in all areas (and not just women's issues) using an 'autonomous' feminist perspective. We need to tread carefully otherwise activist theories become 'rapidly recolonized' and may even become 'a source of new, *sexy* courses and research subjects whose purpose is to attract students, funding and status' (Barker and Cox, 2001-02, 9).

When the Radical Social Movement (RSM) was powerful and involved large sectors of society, the interaction between the two kinds of intellectuals was particularly strong. For example, the Italian anti-psychiatric movement of the 1970s, was firmly connected to street protests. It was characterised by an intense interaction between 'professionals' and 'non professionals'. There was no separation between theorists and activists- theories were constructed collectively and shared practices played a big part in the process. In this context we could locate the *Calate di Reggio Emilia*<sup>11</sup>, characterised for the interaction between some psi-

---

<sup>9</sup> They say activists are looking for intangible rather than material success. I think that, unfortunately, amongst activists we can find all kinds of attitudes.

<sup>10</sup> Lots of different ethical and political positions define themselves as feminist and these distinctions are frequently so strong as to make it difficult to talk about feminism. In this context, I am referring to *autonomous* or *radical* (but not separatist) feminism.

<sup>11</sup> This was part of the anti-psychiatric movement. The action was significant because people living in the mountains of Reggio Emilia subjected psychiatric hospitals to

professionals and other intellectual anti-psychiatry sympathisers with marginalized individuals suffering psychiatric abuse (Antonucci, 1993).

Unfortunately the situation is enormously different nowadays since most large demonstrations are often depoliticised. The spontaneous reaction against oppression (globalisation, war, etc.) are supported and frequently manipulated by the institutional left in a desperate attempt to recover some credibility within right-drifting European governments.<sup>12</sup>

Contemporary institutional powers reconvert the potentiality of protests to their own advantage. A clear example was the Barcelona Summit (2002) where the institutional powers declared, from the outset, their desire to be sympathetic to the marchers' wishes. Thereby urban space was both militarised and at the same time some local space was conceded by the regional authorities for protest meetings. These zones were protected spaces where NGO and union bureaucrats could express their reformist point of view in collaboration with the manipulative wing of the movement. In this farcical game intellectuals acquired a prominent role, giving papers in the University to show to the rest of us that 'another word is possible'. The 'threat' of an imagined 'riotous violence' was then used to justify the burdensome military presence that was deployed to 'protect' the city and its peoples (for a debate on that see Miguel Amoroso, 2002).

At the same time we find ex-radicals are using the situation to gain recognition as future official negotiators with institutional power. Maybe they are bored of having a marginalized paper and no influence on unfolding events; they use their position to increase their kudos in exchange for future 'quotas of formal power' (*cotas de poder formal*). To this end, most of them deviously call for the 'democratisation of the protest' and claim that any form of direct action is violent and will inevitably undermine the subversiveness of Radical Social Movements.

As I will describe below, constitutional powers systematically use the strategy of 'divide and rule' to create false dichotomies (e.g., the dichotomy between peaceful and violent protestors). They are aided in their efforts by the media who designate 'responsible' individuals as the

---

inspection. They decided they want to control the conditions in which their relatives are being kept. For more details see (Colacicchi, 1993).

<sup>12</sup> A clear example is the instrumentalization of the anti-war movement, at least here in Spain. Left parties and unions that supported the entrance of Spain into NATO and the Gulf war are today declaring themselves pacifist in order to gain vote and co-opt the subversive potential of the movement.

spokespersons of the movement and dismiss the rest as ‘too radical’. I don't think it is necessary here to analyse the effects of these dynamics on the movement. Although it is important to note that declarations from alleged progressive intellectuals is intended to divide the movement and undermine alternative groupings.

All this raises considerable doubts in me regarding the possible contributions of disciplines such as critical psychology (especially in English speaking countries), that are becoming academically acceptable. Moreover, we have to recognise that many intellectuals and academics jump on the radical bandwagon and try to take advantage of it, especially since there are so few specialists in this field. As an Italian militant involved with academia reports,<sup>13</sup>

*Spring 1998 [...] explosion of the squatting phenomenon [...] many university barons show a sudden interest in ‘understanding’ squatters and I am called as a possible advisor [...] If I put myself forward as a squatting expert I will surely enhance my career prospects.*

### **Intellectual contribution to division and reabsorption**

In analysing the achievements and failures of Radical Social Movements we have to consider the tools, which the System employs to undermine the subversive power of activities and imagination. In my opinion two of the more successful strategies adopted by the System are *reabsorption* and *splitting*; in both, the part played by intellectuals and more specifically, academics, is determinant. Here I wish to examine these processes in more detail.

When struggles gain public support the System puts into practice various strategies to re-colonize some of the more explicit demands. They take the demand, turn it upside down, empty it of meaning and use it as a slogan to shut up ‘popular protest’.

Even some of the ‘human resources’ of the Movement, that is some of the activists, are reabsorbed into the body politic. This probably occurs for different reasons: some militants enter the movement not because they are completely disenchanted with formal politics but because they are not able

---

<sup>13</sup> From a private e-mail dated 12 October 2000 reproduced with the permission of the author.

to enter it directly; some may genuinely believe they can subvert the System from within; some may not realise until much later that they are being used by shady political parties or groups; others still may feel frustrated by the ‘flawed’ strategies adopted by the Radical Social Movement or may even diverge politically from the new positions.

In any case, since the System has been able to both recycle part of the movement’s demands and directly recruit some of its leaders, it can de-radicalise the militants. This is what I call *reabsorption*, in which both populist dictatorships and modern phallo-centric democracies specialise in, with academics as the state’s accomplice. Two painful examples can show how the process works.

The first is the inclusion of ‘feminist’ discourse, within societies that arrogantly call themselves ‘first world’, into mainstream socio-political discourse. Politicians are now careful to be politically correct<sup>14</sup> and encourage women participation in a world constructed on hetero-patriarchal philosophy. Some feminists lend themselves to such manoeuvres in order to obtain a ‘power quota’. And some may even pretend to be feminists as a matter of policy. Consequently we have positive discriminatory laws by which governments and trans-national organisations enhance their dominating positions and act as Father-figures to their subjects. So we witness in North Europe and the USA<sup>15</sup> many gender study departments have completely compromised politics and use women as objects (rarely subjects) of study. This creates a vacuum in the intergenerational transmission belt and at the same time permits the marginalization of rebellious women who refuse to accept the lie of equality<sup>16</sup>. Moreover,

*Feminist philosophy has not escaped the pull of the univocal concept of power and the results are clear. It has entered into a dynamics in which the allegedly radical discourse travels on the same false path as traditional misogynist discourse... the self-serving lies of patriarchal discourse are converted into alternative discourse and projected as naturalism (Valcárcel, 1994, 81).*

---

<sup>14</sup> ‘Conceptual change not directly reflected in a transformation of practices and behaviours’ (Fernandéz, 2000, p 65).

<sup>15</sup> In South Europe it is difficult make a similar analysis because there are so few Women Studies departments.

<sup>16</sup> We are encouraged to believe that equal opportunities exist in the ‘civilised world’; we can abort unwanted pregnancies, we can work in the public domain. However, the government’s dominating attitude towards us remains intact which is typical of the hetero-patriarchal capitalist system we are living under.

In this sense activist critics of academia are still relevant; for example, Cecilia<sup>17</sup>, criticises academic Italian feminists who did not come out against the reformists who wanted to forbid abortion.

The second painful example comes from the Italian anti-psychiatry movement. Law 180<sup>18</sup> which in theory aimed for a more open model of psychic pain, left three enormous legislative holes: First, it retained the *TSO*<sup>19</sup>; second, it didn't close the criminal 'madhouses' (Barbieri, 1995); and, finally, it supported the *inabilitazione*<sup>20</sup> (Biglia, 1999). The government passed these laws with the approval of society since they were seen as liberating. The supposed empowerment either didn't materialise or was pushed through in a reformist manner (Telefono Viola<sup>21</sup>). In this way the government boycotted all the genuinely alternative approaches. First, subsidies were eliminated and later on draconian laws were employed to shut down individual and collective radical projects. Ironically, the Italian psychiatric laws are still deemed 'progressive' by some.

These were two examples from the past but I believe the germ of a very similar process can be seen in various sectors of the 'anti-globalisation movement'. Academic writings have often favoured reabsorption of critics by recolonising collective knowledge within the borders of 'scientific space'.

The second phenomenon, which needs discussing, is the 'divide-and-rule' tactics of the state. Within autonomous groupings the development of a collective identity has always been a necessary component of recognising a common struggle and the fight against oppression. We need a group consciousness in order to be subversive, since 'any group that leads an autonomous existence [...] constitutes a constant danger for the dominant group' (Apfelbaum, 1999, p 269). Obviously if the identity becomes homogenising it could suffocate the group and the subjectivity within it (Biglia, 2003). As I explained before, various occasions are used to

---

<sup>17</sup> Cecilia Cortesi (2002) e-mail to a list of younger feminist researcher (30-something) <http://www.women.it/mailman/listinfo/30smthing>. Reproduced with the permission of the author.

<sup>18</sup> The law text should be found in <http://www.ecn.org/telviola/L180.HTM>

<sup>19</sup> *Trattamento Sanitario Obbligatorio* (Obligatory Sanitary Therapy). A judge can decide that you have to be treated against your wishes, you can be kept in hospital and they can force you to take all the medication they believe you need.

<sup>20</sup> Literally, 'disqualification'. It is a judicial term meaning that disqualified people lose all legal privileges; they can't decide on their own fate, they can't spend their own money nor can they vote in elections. A legal guardian is designated to take all such decisions.

<sup>21</sup> [www.ecn.org/telviola](http://www.ecn.org/telviola)

instigate difference amongst groups (the banal discourse on violence is one of them, see Lopez-Adan, 1996). However, I firmly believe that the division between ‘physical’<sup>22</sup> and theoretical activists is the most significant factor. This is a division that academics actively encourage.

This is because the intellectuals tend to reproduce exclusive jargons that continue the very technical and social divisions of labor they purport to want to deconstruct. Fearing academic manipulation, groups then tend to either evolve around identities devoid of theoretical elements, or exalt theories. Both alternatives when not destroying the subversive power of the collective imaginary at least limit its scope. An additional problem is that the ‘anti-capitalist movement’ still contains figures who consciously or otherwise wish to resurrect Marxist-Leninism’s desire to ‘educate the people’. Its more intellectual dimension tends to normalise certain positions and by default exclude other struggles as secondary. For example, women have frequently been asked to subordinate their struggles against discrimination to those of the class (Charles, 2000, Diaz, 1983, Sardella, 2001, Schuman, 1998, Vázquez et al., 1996).

All this causes a separation between the alleged intellectuals and those who practice politics from within their own skin. In this context the comments of some Chilean activists that I interviewed in 2001 are of relevance<sup>23</sup>. These *pobladoras*<sup>24</sup> have been fighting for years firstly against the dictatorship and today against the falsehood of the democracy and the various discriminations (class, ethnic and gender ones) that persist. They may not possess academic knowledge but if you stop and listen to their words an entire world of wisdom unfolds before your eyes. They have recounted several experiences to me when they felt excluded by professional feminist activists:

*They don't look at you badly, but the discourse they use is not pluralist ... it is not a discourse that involves pobladoras women...there are just a few professional women who 'come down' to*

---

<sup>22</sup> Physical activists are those who perform the tasks that the movement requires, those who clean the toilets, cook, work behind the bar, put their body into actions etc...Theoretical activists are those who generally plan the activities, write flyers, make contacts with other groups, talk as representatives. Women of any age, young males and people from ethnic minorities or lower class background are frequently reduced to the role of physical activist.

<sup>23</sup> This interview is part of my PhD on the reproduction of gender discrimination within the Radical Social Movement. More information on the thesis on <http://www.ub.es/donesMS>

<sup>24</sup> *Pobladoras* is a South American term used in relation to women (*pobladores* is for men) that live in poor neighbours.

*the level of the people, [but you get the impression they feel] if you aren't a professional you are nobody.*

They become more enraged on hearing pious progressive discourse on an abstract poverty,

*... when we are here fucking hungry and are fed an excellent discourse ... [you realize how empty it is] and that you are defrauded by It ... for that reason organized women don't trust professionals very much...*

In this case feminist professional attitudes caused feelings of exclusion. Similarly, various anti-capitalist groups create discourses and practices that exclude people who are not used to theories. Once again the role played by intellectuals is to erect barriers that maintain the separation between 'popular' energies and 'revolutionary' discourse.

### **Critical contradictions and travelling within/out movements**

Some may agree with my criticism of mainstream theories but argue that they cannot possibly apply to critical theory since the latter operates within a different schema. I believe, however, that my criticisms do apply to critical theory as well. Below I will try to expand on this.

The critic frequently engages in normative practice and more specifically academics expect their students to follow their lead in their work. At the beginning it may be necessary to create a group identity to protect the minority group from the incursions of 'official' theories (Biglia, 2003), but later on it becomes a way of monopolising the power. One of the reasons for this process maybe the necessity of working in a relaxing way. As Ussher makes clear:

*[...] Today critical psychology means something different to me. It is not fighting for small change, for recognition, for an inroad into the mainstream of psychology. Those endeavours are admirable, and I have nothing but respect for those who wish to pursue that path [...]. But I don't have the energy, or the inclination, any more. I have come to the conclusion that innovative, meaningful research or teaching cannot be carried out, at least without great personal cost, if critical psychologists are having to justify their existences on a daily basis; if they are having to explain, persuade and cajole, rather than engage*

*in dialogue with others of a similar disposition and intellectual bent; if they have to watch their back (p 19).*

It is significant that even the Temporary Autonomous Zones (TAZ) which Hakim Bey (1985) wishes to see transformed into Permanent Autonomous Zones (PAZ) are generally characterised by two or three individuals in charge of hefty ideological decisions. So dialogues that Ussher wants to see develop become closed dialogues where it is advantageous to conform to the critical 'party line'. The biggest problem is that, within supposedly horizontal groups, which are not explicitly authoritarian, it is difficult to recognise leadership and subject it to criticism. This is a strange process in which we are all 'free to think' as our unacknowledged leaders, otherwise we are out.

Moreover, such groups tend to become endogamous in order to avoid contamination from other critical sources and frequently end up not co-operating with each other because they all believe they possess the deeper and more radical critique of the status quo.

Theoretically there may not exist a separation between knowledge-theories and activism. We are critical academics so we must be on the same side as activists. We organize horizontally and we don't want to manipulate the movement. But we celebrate our arrival to a meeting with half an hour of theoretical chat not understood by non-specialists. I want to mention two experiences in this regard, one from my activist space and the other from my academic milieu.

The first experience comes from an assembly of activists I was involved with around ten years ago in Italy. In theory it was a closed group (just for militants with similar politics), organized horizontally as a response to an upcoming protest. The group consisted of about 30 people. Most of us, between 18 and 24 years old, learned about the meeting just a few days in advance. The meeting started with a 90-minute talk by two academic-activists who read from a written paper. After their talk they ask if there was any disagreement with their analysis. I felt as if they were mocking us. Obviously for me, as for most of my friends, it was impossible to understand let alone provide an impromptu critique of a highly complex analysis. Faced with this interrogation all we could do was to try to decide whether we should remain in the group or leave.

Another example comes from a few years ago in Spain, during a meeting between critical teachers and students who wanted to change academia. All

the students sat at the back of the room and remained silent throughout. In contrast, the lecturers occupied the front row and monopolised the ‘discussion’. When I complained that if we want to change the authoritarian dynamics of academia we have to make an effort to create a space in which everyone feels free to talk, one of the lecturers retorted, ‘here everybody can talk freely and if student don’t feel free it is their problem’. At this stage one student did say that it was difficult to talk under such conditions, but he was ignored.

What I am trying to say is that this ‘TAZ’ frequently becomes a closed ghetto that tends to produce a static critique- a critique that can be ‘easily’ reabsorbed by mainstream academic discourse. Our inability or unwillingness to be self-critical tends to normalise our contribution. At the same time not-so-critical academics see the autonomous zones created as an opportunity to acquire power. It seems that having acquired an academic position most criticals start to feel tired of fighting and prefer to maintain their little privileges and end up becoming auto-referential and a bit pathetic.

Having analysed some of the limitations and negatives influences of academic discourse, I want to end by returning to the question posed by the editors of ARCP. It seems to me that in both academia and the ‘anti-globalization’ movement the ‘radicalising’ process mainly consists in emptying the content of criticism. Given this situation, is a cross-fertilisation between critical psychology and the anti-capitalist movement possible? I feel the only positive fertilisation possible is achieved through being a person- I mean the voluntary performing of ourselves and our bodies and not our professional ‘persona’.

That doesn’t mean we cannot bring to the University ethics and practices developed by us as militants. Moreover, we can serve our activism through knowledge gained in academia and the privileges of our status. But we have to be careful not to instrumentalize Radical Social Movement practices and theories for the benefit of academics nor engage with the Radical Social Movement with a superior attitude.

I believe if we want to be useful to the Radical Social Movement we should not aim to do something *for* RSM as academics, but instead work *within* them and act as activists. Perhaps the best thing Critical Psychology, as a ‘theoretical group’, could do is to let the anti-capitalist movement get on with its work without interference. As persons with a psychological background and a critical attitude we can use our knowledge within RSM

to subvert academia by taking a radical position in the classroom and research.

I agree with the criticisms friends made regarding the pessimism of this paper. Perhaps we have to look at the positive experiences being developed outside Academia. Although this article is not the space to enter into a deep analysis of that space, I like to mention it briefly. Research-militants from different disciplines are fighting against the commercialisation of knowledge and are producing shared-knowledge (e.g., the GNU Project, Copy left), organizing autonomous teams of research (e.g., Universidad Nomada, Laser, Facoltà di Fuga, Universidad de las Madres de Plaza de Mayo). And many people use shared-knowledge in their neighbourhoods or work places. Reappropriation of knowledge is a necessary tool for social transformation, nevertheless, I believe it is just as important we maintain a strong self-critical attitude. And finally what we should do as researcher-academics?

...A bit less talking, a bit more doing!●

## **Acknowledgment**

It would take an entire book to mention all the people that, in some way, have contributed to the formation of opinions expressed in this paper. For this reason I just make a collective acknowledgment.

Firstly, to all the activists that shared with me their analyses especially friends from Italy, Catalonia, Chile, Britain, Spain and Argentina. Secondly, I owe a real debt of gratitude to autonomist feminists particularly to UEP and MPKbarna groups. At the same time I have to thank all the people that without defining themselves as activists have a strong social commitment to everyday life.

Moreover, thanks to Erica Burman and Ian Parker who introduced me to the most committed parts of critical psychology. Last but not least I would like to acknowledge Jordi Bonet-Martin, Ricard Moreno-Alegret and Laurence Cox, who commented on the first draft of the work.

To all of you lots of hugs and cariños, grazie!

## References

- Amoroso M. (2002) Barcelona entre valles y flores, DIY: Recursos Oscuros
- Apfelbaum, E. (1999) 'Relations of domination and movements for liberation: an analysis of power between groups (Abridged)', *Feminism & Psychology* 9 (3): 267-72.
- Barbieri D. (1995) Un lager italiano. Quei matti da slegare en Avvenimenti del 20 Settembre 1995. p. 54-56
- Barker C., Cox L. (2001-2) What have the Romans ever done for us? Academic and activist forms of movement theorising en <http://www.iol.ie/~mazzoldi/toolsforchange/afpp/afpp8.html>
- Bey H. (1985) T.A.Z. Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism, NY: Autonomedia
- Bey H. (1993) Permanent TAZs, NY: Autonomedia
- Biglia B. (1999) Buscando hilos: l'Antipsichiatria italiana, El rayo que no cesa nº 1
- Biglia B. (2000) *Universidades: ¿espacios de creación o recreación de conocimientos?* on Athenea Digital, revista de pensamiento social, April 28<sup>th</sup>.
- Biglia B. (2003) Women in mixed SMs, experiences of contradictions in their subjectivities & individualities, in press
- Bonet-Martí J. (2003) A l'altre costat del mirall o per que m'interessen unes jornades de conreerca des del Moviments Socials. Photocopies.
- Bucalo G. (1997) DIZIONARIO ANTIPSICHIATRICO. Esplorazioni e viaggi attraverso la follia. Sicilia: Punto L
- Charles N. (2000) *Feminism, the State and Social Policy*. London: McMillan.
- Colacicchi P. (1993) Le Calate di Reggio Emilia in Antonucci G. *Critica al giudizio psichiatrico*, Roma: Sensibili alle foglie
- Diaz, G. (1983) 'Roles and contradictions of chilean women in the resistance and Exile', pp.30-38 in Davies M. (eds) *Third World Second Sex*. London: Zed Books
- Fernández Poncela A.M. (2000) *Mujeres, revolución y cambio cultural*. Barcelona: Anthropos
- Gordo-Lopez A. (2001) De la Crítica al Academicismo Metodológico: líneas de acción contra los desalojos sociocríticos: photocopies.
- LASER (2002) *Scienza Spa. Scienziati tecnici e conflitti*. Roma: Derive Approdi.
- Law I. & Lax B. (1998). What is critical psychology? An interview with Erica Burman & Ian Parker. En *Geko* Vol 2: 51-61
- Lopez-Adan E. (1996) *Terrorismo y violencia revolucionaria*. Bilbao: Likiniano Elkarte.

- Plows, A. J. (1998) 'Collective identity through Collective Action-Environmental Direct Action in Britain'. Paper given in M.A. University of Wales Bangor: UK, photocopies.
- Sardella, P. (2001) 'Donna e bello' in Brilli F.(eds) Gli anni della rivolta. 1960-1980: prima, durante e dopo il '68. Milano: Punto Rosso.
- Schumann, G. (1998) Mujeres en kurdistan. Hondarribia: HIRU.
- Subbuswamy K., Patel R. (2001) Cultures of domination: Race and gender in radical movements. En Abramsky K. (Eds.) *Restructuring and Resistance. Diverse voices of struggle in Western Europe* Self-published. Pp 541-543
- Telefono Viola Manicomio. La chiusura dei manicomi prevista per la fine del '96 e' un bluff. En <http://www.ecn.org/telviola/MANICOMI.HTM>
- Traful M. (2002) Por una politica nocturna, Madrid: Debate
- Ussher J. (2000) Critical psychology in the mainstream: a struggle for survival, in Sloan T. (Eds.) *Critical psychology. voices for change*, London: Macmillan, p: 6-20
- Valcárcel A. (1994) Sexo y filosofía. Sobre 'mujer' y 'poder', Barcelona: Anthropos
- Vázquez, N. and Ibáñez, C. and Murguialday, C. (1996) Mujeres montaña, vivencia de guerrilleras y colaboradoras del FMLN. Madrid: Horas y Horas.
- Wall, D. (1999) *Earth First! and the Anti-Roads Movement Radical Environmentalism & Comparative Social Movements*. London: Routledge.